



ECI inmates take part in Arbor Day plantings

By Greg Latshaw
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WESTOVER -- Maryland inmates lent green thumbs to Arbor Day on Wednesday, planting 6,000 trees statewide, including along Route 50 near Salisbury.

The 150 seedlings planted on an acre of green space along Stanton Avenue at the Route 50 Bypass pays dividends to nature and the individual inmate, said Mike Miller, administrative assistant to the warden at Eastern Correctional Institution. "Whether planting trees or fixing up a ball field, inmates are finding a way to do better for the community," said Miller, estimating 10 inmates from the Poplar Hill Pre-Release unit helped plant the trees in two hours. The oak, maple, gum, cherry and walnut trees are part of the state Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services goal to plant 1 million trees through inmates' labors.

The project is part of a broader mission by DPSCS Secretary Gary D. Maynard to expand the number of services inmates can offer to nonprofits and municipalities. It includes, among others, removing graffiti and restoring blighted areas. "One of his main goals is to be more proactive in the community and offer community help when applicable," said DPSCS spokesman Mark Vernarelli.

The tree-planting initiative coincided with the state's observance of Arbor Day. While national Arbor Day is the last Friday in April, most states celebrate their own dates, based on best planting practices. The holiday's roots are in Nebraska, where a Detroit frontiersman and journalist lobbied for planting trees on the empty plains. In 1874, the governor proclaimed the state's first Arbor Day. Linda Nabb, Hurlock zoning administrator, said 1,600 trees will soon be planted by inmates at the Dorchester County town's industrial park.

Public officials planted 12 seedlings Wednesday in a symbolic ceremony, but next week several native species could be planted on 2.3 acres. The trees include loblolly pine, northern red oak, black cherry and redbud, she said. "It's not (just) a landscaping project, but a habitat creation project," Nabb said.

Mark Howard, State Highway Administration eastern region landscape operations team leader, said the trees planted near Salisbury will improve vegetation, now hazardous to mow down. In addition to providing four total acres to plant on, SHA brought a water tank for the seedlings and about 60 yards of mulch, Howard said. "Planting trees is a much better use of the land," he said.

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